



CHICAGO CUBS DAILY CLIPS

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July 10, 2018

- The Athletic, **Kyle Hendricks gets back on track in San Francisco — but can the rest of the rotation follow suit?**
<https://theathletic.com/426618/2018/07/10/kyle-hendricks-gets-back-on-track-in-san-francisco-but-can-the-rest-of-the-rotation-follow-suit/>
- The Athletic, **Cubs mourn the loss of Ken Ravizza, mental skills coach, expert listener and friend to everyone**
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- The Athletic, **Mooney: Jon Lester is the greatest free-agent signing in Chicago sports history**
<https://theathletic.com/425736/2018/07/09/mooney-jon-lester-is-the-greatest-free-agent-signing-in-chicago-sports-history/>
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- Cubs.com, **Bryant launches homer in first rehab game**
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The Athletic

Kyle Hendricks gets back on track in San Francisco — but can the rest of the rotation follow suit?
By Sahadev Sharma

SAN FRANCISCO – With the doubters out in full force after his last rough outing, Kyle Hendricks was out to show the world that with just a little mechanical fine-tuning, he would once again find his pristine form. He did just that on Monday.

“Kyle was outstanding,” manager Joe Maddon said after his team’s 2-1 loss in 11 innings to the San Francisco Giants. “That’s the Kyle that we know and love. We’ve seen that in the past. Actually, that’s one of the best games I’ve seen him throw.”

Hendricks delivered 8 1/3 innings, a high for any Cubs starter this season, and allowed just one unearned run on five hits while striking out a season-high eight and walking just one. Ailed by inconsistent mechanics of late, Hendricks entered the evening with a 4.27 ERA while struggling to find any command of his fastball, which led to an inability to get chases on his changeup. However, on this night he was at his best. He didn’t walk a batter until the final hitter he faced and only got to a three-ball count three times.

“Relief in a way, but still, it’s just one outing,” Hendricks said. “Felt good to feel the good ones and now I gotta ingrain those good habits. Back at it tomorrow playing catch. But today was definitely a big positive for me.”

Hendricks knew what had been wrong with him mechanically and was working on it in between starts. But he admitted that his mechanics still hadn’t been there consistently — until he finally got it going a few innings into Monday’s start.

“In the third inning, something just clicked and I was able to repeat one after another,” Hendricks said. “That was just a really good feeling.”

Hendricks threw 109 pitches and induced 16 swing and misses, 13 on his changeup — a high on the season. He threw 10 curveballs, just the second time this year he’s reached double digits on the pitch.

“We’ve been wanting to throw it more, wanting to mix it in,” Hendricks said of the curve. “Just haven’t really been throwing the other stuff good enough to do that. Today, the fastball command was finally there and it just opened up the rest of the game for me.”

And after throwing four four-seamers in his last outing, Statcast indicated Hendricks went to the pitch 32 times, and the sinker 29 times, the first time this season he’s thrown more four-seamers than sinkers in a start. He also threw the changeup 38 times, the first time this season he’s thrown it more than any other pitch in a single outing.

“If you don’t have good fastball command, you don’t have a changeup,” catcher Willson Contreras said. “That’s what he had going for him today.”

On the season, opponents were hitting just .156 with a .241 slugging against Hendricks’ changeup and a 36.6 percent whiff/swing rate. Those numbers are just a tick worse than his Cy Young-caliber 2016, but better than last season’s numbers against the pitch. The problem was, hitters were chasing the change outside the zone just 38.6 percent of the time, down from 52.6 percent in 2016 and 46.4 percent last season. Hendricks said his fastball was working better for him Monday than it has all season long. In turn, that made his devastating changeup as effective as it’s supposed to be.

“Just getting my glove-side fastball today was huge,” Hendricks said. “Everything works off that. So the changeup just came from there. Found my lanes, found the arm slot and that had to be the best changeup I’ve had all year.”

Despite the loss, the Cubs know that if they can get more starts like that from Hendricks, the starting pitching — their biggest weakness so far this season — can finally turn a corner and become the strength many expected it to be.

“That’s really important for us,” Maddon said. “To this point, we’ve been having good at-bats, hitting the ball well. Tonight we did not. That’s the item we’ve been looking for with the hitting we’ve been getting. But going forward, that becomes contagious sometimes too when you get a guy pitching like that. I really believe you can see that version of Kyle most of the time for the rest of the season.”

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The Athletic

Cubs mourn the loss of Ken Ravizza, mental skills coach, expert listener and friend to everyone
By Sahadev Sharma

SAN FRANCISCO – The Cubs lost one of their own late Sunday night as renowned sports psychologist Dr. Ken Ravizza passed away after suffering a heart attack early last week. He was 70 years old.

“He was the best at what he did,” manager Joe Maddon said.

Maddon said he’d been expecting good news and believed Ravizza, who was in a medically induced coma, would pull out of it and recover. However, when the Cubs arrived in San Francisco late Sunday evening, Maddon received a text from Ravizza’s wife passing along the bad news.

Maddon met Ravizza in the mid-1980s while he was working in the minor leagues for the California Angels. Seeing eye-to-eye on the mental aspect of the game, their relationship blossomed over the years. When Maddon was named manager of the Tampa Bay Rays, Ravizza followed, and when Maddon got the Cubs gig, Ravizza became an integral part of the open clubhouse culture Maddon has helped build in Chicago.

In a world where talking about mental health was once anathema, and oftentimes still is, Ravizza was well ahead of his time. His work went beyond baseball as he impacted athletes across the professional and amateur ranks, first getting recognized for his work at Cal State-Fullerton and its highly accomplished baseball program.

During those early days together, Maddon said their mental skills work was confined to the minor leagues and spring training as nearly every manager at the big-league level had no interest in talking about the mental side of the game.

“For a lot of people it was a sign of weakness,” Maddon said. “I tried to convince them, no, he’s another coach. No different than your hitting coach, pitching coach or infield coach. He’s gonna help you think more clearly in a difficult moment. And that’s a good thing. For a long time, it was hard.”

Eventually, mental skills training became more accepted in sports. But if not for Ravizza, ex-players like John Baker and Darnell McDonald, both part of the Cubs mental skills team, may not be doing what they do now.

“He was a wonderful person,” Baker said. “He changed the landscape of how we approach the mental side of all sports. He started so long ago. He taught so many different people. His impact spreads farther than we’ll ever be able to measure. So many people learned from him. Without somebody like him, my job doesn’t exist. He started it all. Just by showing up to work I think that kind of honors his legacy.”

Anthony Rizzo explained why Ravizza was able to make mental health issues less stigmatized in sports.

“He has a résumé,” Rizzo said. “He knows the game of baseball, but he wasn’t really talking about your mechanics. He’d just sit there, listen to what you had to say and take you through it. His perspective on life was so amazing.”

That perspective helped many players over the years. Of the current Cubs, Mike Montgomery, Willson Contreras, Kyle Hendricks and Tommy La Stella can credit Ravizza for his guidance. Whenever the Cubs would come out to the West Coast, Ravizza would often show up. During that time, he’d meet with Maddon and the two would discuss who may need some guidance. Ravizza was also a familiar, smiling face at Wrigley Field.

La Stella spoke to Ravizza during that difficult time in 2016 when he was struggling with his place in baseball. But La Stella said it was more than just that tough time in his life when Ravizza impacted him.

“Truthfully, we didn’t talk much baseball,” La Stella said. “We talked about whatever, anything and everything other than baseball, really.

“He was an unbelievable person and even a better friend. Expert listener. I think that’s something that’s kind of a lost art nowadays. Everyone is in a rush to share their opinions and share what they know. That wasn’t Ken. His greatest strength was his ability to listen and truly hear what you needed and put it in a language that makes sense. He had such a knack for that. His communication came from his ability to listen.”

Maddon credited Ravizza for many of the sayings that have become synonymous with his name, including “Attitude is a decision” and “Do not permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure.” According to players in the Cubs clubhouse, Ravizza helped build a team-first attitude.

“He would never have taken credit for it, but so much of the ethos that you hear about here, that we generally associate 100 percent with Joe, I think a big part of that is Ken Ravizza,” Baker said. “I think that’s how he lives on. We built that in so that those are absolutes that are expected. People don’t even think about doing those things. When you don’t think about doing those things, you sometimes have trouble attributing it to who it came from. Any time you see someone take a deep breath on the mound or step out, reset and clear themselves, that’s Ken.”

“I miss him already,” Maddon said. “I hear his voice in my head. He’s left an eternal impact on a lot of us.”

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The Athletic

Mooney: Jon Lester is the greatest free-agent signing in Chicago sports history

By Patrick Mooney

Jon Lester accepted the idea that “\$155 million” would essentially become part of his name and uniform. Lester embraced Chicago’s obsession with sports, choosing No. 34 as a tribute to Walter Payton, Kerry Wood and Nolan Ryan. Lester had already told this to Cubs president Theo Epstein during his recruiting trip: “They’re going to burn this city down again when we win the World Series.”

Lester didn’t exactly court the Chicago media — his body language at his locker sometimes screams get off my lawn and he can look uncomfortable when he first sits down in the Wrigley Field interview room, wearing a windowpane checked sport coat instead of the T-shirt-and-sweatpants look. But Lester always warms up and answers direct questions honestly, taking full paragraphs to express his thoughts on just about any big-picture issue surrounding the team or Major League Baseball.

Lester earned the benefit of the doubt by confronting his weaknesses, admitting that he inexplicably had trouble throwing the ball to first base and rolling with the jokes about his .000 batting average coming over from the American League. Don’t let the yips, the cowboy hat or the 6-foot-4, 240-pound frame fool you. Lester had enough athleticism and physicality that as a teenager: 1. An Italian soccer club once offered him a professional contract after noticing him at an international tournament. 2. He also played center field at Bellarmine Prep, a Jesuit high school in Tacoma, Washington.

Lester has the demeanor, sense of responsibility, right amount of insecurity and elite skills to handle playing for an iconic team in a big market. Why the Boston Red Sox would lowball a pitcher like that, ship him to the Oakland A's at the 2014 trade deadline and allow Epstein's crew to swoop in is a different story. But put it all together and Lester is the greatest free-agent signing in the history of Chicago sports.

You don't even need Sunday's All-Star selection to make that case. But in Year 4 of his megadeal, Lester is 11-2 with a 2.45 ERA and in position to reach 30 starts and 200 innings for the ninth time in his career and earn his fourth World Series ring.

Lester's consistency and durability stands out on a team that is somehow 51-36 while getting across-the-board underperformance from the rest of its opening day rotation: Kyle Hendricks (4.27 ERA), Yu Darvish (one win in eight starts), José Quintana (4.22 ERA) and Tyler Chatwood (70 walks and 71 hits in 79 innings).

"We've had one guy that's been carrying it," Hendricks said, "and the rest of us have just been up and down."

This is about being in the right place at the right time. Coming off five straight fifth-place finishes — and in the middle of an unprecedented big-market teardown and a massive stadium restoration — the Cubs desperately needed Lester to add credibility, stabilize their rotation and establish a sense of professionalism inside the clubhouse.

No other free agent who moved to Chicago faced expectations quite like this, the biggest contract in franchise history at the time plus a championship drought that lasted more than a century plus the injury/wear-and-tear concerns that make pitchers such risky investments.

The '85 Bears in the Pro Football Hall of Fame — Payton, Mike Singletary, Dan Hampton and Richard Dent — were originally draft picks who became part of an unforgettable team.

The Bulls built their dynasty after the Portland Trail Blazers famously selected Sam Bowie with the No. 2 overall pick in the 1984 draft, surrounding Michael Jordan with future Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen (draft-day deal with the Seattle SuperSonics), future Hall of Famer/North Korean diplomat Dennis Rodman (trade with the San Antonio Spurs) and a collection of role players that led to six NBA titles.

Frank Thomas was a drafted-and-developed Hall of Famer on the South Side. Carlton Fisk picked a Boston cap for his Cooperstown plaque after spending 13 seasons with the White Sox that yielded only four playoff games. Jermaine Dye absolutely delivered in the first season of a contract that initially guaranteed only two years and a little more than \$10 million, generating 31 homers, 86 RBIs and a 2005 World Series MVP performance.

Stung and frustrated by collusion, Andre Dawson offered the Cubs a blank contract and became the 1987 National League MVP, putting up 49 homers, 137 RBIs and Gold Glove defense ... for a last-place team.

The best comparison for a Cubs franchise that hoped Anthony Rizzo and Kris Bryant could become their version of Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews is probably Marian Hossa, who signed a 12-year, \$62.8 million contract in the summer of 2009 that lifted the Blackhawks toward three Stanley Cup celebrations.

Since the beginning of the 2015 season, Lester has made 114 starts for the Cubs, going 54-27 with a 3.20 ERA and a 1.150 WHIP. He's pitched in the NLCS in three straight years and earned two All-Star selections. He finished second in the 2016 NL Cy Young Award voting. He started Game 1 in all three playoff rounds during the 2016 World Series run, becoming the NLCS co-MVP with Javier Báez.

"I got two, maybe three more years to screw it up on the other end, I guess," Lester said. "I was very fortunate to fall into a year where I had some people bidding against each other and in no way, shape or form did I expect a contract like what I got. I'm very grateful for it every day. The last thing I'm worried about is that.

"I'm worried about my teammates and this city and performing and doing my job. At the same time, I'm having fun doing it. It's a good group and it makes you come to work every day and appreciate what I've been given. That's all I can do, show up every five days and pitch. That's my job, so I try to take a lot of pride in that."

The Cubs are at AT&T Park this week and the even-year San Francisco Giants would look a lot different if Lester hadn't taken less guaranteed money for the chance to make history in Chicago and instead accepted a seven-year, \$168 million offer to play with Buster Posey in the Bay Area.

After Lester made his final decision, Cubs officials toasted their hard work and good fortune with shots at a San Diego hotel bar during the 2014 winter meetings. Reporters swarmed new manager Joe Maddon when he showed up in the lobby of the Manchester Grand Hyatt and compared it to winning "the baseball lottery," though that might have been the red wine talking.

"Woof," Maddon said with a laugh. "I was having dinner with Ruben Amaro and Dave Hollins right before that and I was very concerned with myself."

The Cubs braced for the hangover in the second half of this six-year contract, knowing the projections for a 34-year-old lefty who has now thrown nearly 2,300 innings plus almost an extra season in the playoffs (9-7, 2.55 ERA in 148 innings). But Lester is still producing like a top-of-the-rotation starter who can lead this team back into October.

"Honestly, yes, [I've expected this] the more I've gotten to know him," Maddon said. "That first year, obviously, he had a few bumps in the road. And even last year maybe wasn't [exactly where] he would like it. But the guy pitches and he knows what he's doing out there.

"He's got this calm way. I think a big part of the ascendance, in a sense, has been based on his fielding or his ability to control the running game better. The method with him and Anthony and Willson [Contreras], that's taken a little bit of a burden off him where he can just pitch now.

"Jonny doesn't have that mid-90s stuff that he used to have, but he knows what he's doing out there. And I think that's what you're seeing. You're seeing a guy that really understands his craft."

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Cubs.com

Hendricks stellar as Cubs fall in extras

By Martin Oppegard

SAN FRANCISCO -- Kyle Hendricks finally looked like himself.

On a brisk Monday night at AT&T Park, the right-hander didn't look the part of a pitcher who had not gone past the sixth inning since May 25.

Rather, Hendricks looked rejuvenated in the 2-1 extra-inning loss to the Giants. Across 8 1/3 innings, he located his fastball, threw his curve with confidence and baffled the Giants with a devastating changeup. Of Hendricks' eight strikeouts, seven were of the swinging variety on his signature change. He threw first-pitch strikes to 22 of the 31 batters he faced and walked only one.

"It was a much better feeling out there," Hendricks said. "The fastball command was finally there and it just opened up the rest of the game for me. Willy [catcher Willson Contreras] and I were just really on the same page, mixing pitches, keeping them off balance, and that's the game I have to play."

Manager Joe Maddon demonstrated confidence in his right-hander, letting Hendricks begin the ninth inning despite a pitch count of 102. After a one-out walk, Maddon turned to lefty Randy Rosario to record the final two outs of the inning.

"I thought Kyle was outstanding," Maddon said. "That's one of the best games I've seen him throw. I mean physically, his stuff was that good. The velocity was better than normal. The location of the fastball was outstanding. The changeup was a swing-and-miss pitch again."

Anthony Rizzo shared Maddon's praise of Hendricks.

"His command was pretty incredible," the first baseman said. "He was doing his thing, that's what Kyle does. It was nice to see him do that and go that deep tonight."

"He had great stuff today," Contreras added. "I think it's probably one of his best outings so far this season. We were able to get ahead of batters and that helped him a lot."

Hendricks' lone blemish, an unearned run, came across to score in the fifth inning on an errant pickoff attempt in which Rizzo was charged with his second error of the game.

"I'm always pretty good over there," Hendricks said. "I make good throws. But that one I just pulled kind of up the line. I've got to make better throws on that."

The Cubs offense could not pick up Hendricks, who was matched pitch for pitch by rookie Andrew Suarez. The combination of Suarez and five Giants relievers held the Cubs' prolific lineup to just four hits.

In the 11th inning, the Giants notched a pair of one-out hits off Steve Cishek. Maddon brought in right-hander Pedro Strop, and after Brandon Crawford was intentionally walked to load the bases, Pablo Sandoval slashed a walk-off single to left to lift the Giants in the series opener.

Despite the loss, Maddon did not understate the importance of Hendricks' outing Monday.

"That's the outing we've been looking for with the hitting that we've been doing recently," Maddon said. "Going forward, that becomes contagious sometimes, when you've got a guy that pitches like that. I really believe you could see that version of Kyle most of the time for the rest of the season."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

David Bote and Ian Happ both inconspicuously grounded out in the seventh inning, letting Hendricks -- who was only at 79 pitches through six innings -- stay in the game.

"If it came to the point when his at-bat came up," Maddon said, "if somebody had gotten on base I was going to hit for him. It was two outs, nobody on -- I said, 'I'm not taking him out of this game.'"

Hendricks grounded out to first but pitched two more scoreless frames, as well as recording one out in the ninth, before departing. It was his longest outing since he threw a complete game on Aug. 1, 2016.

INJURY UPDATE

Yu Darvish played catch before Monday's game for the first time since he received a cortisone shot in his right arm June 29. Maddon said Darvish, who has been sidelined since May 20 with tendinitis in his right triceps and had been shut down after suffering shoulder impingement, is "trending in the right direction."

SOUND SMART

After falling behind in the count, 1-2, Javier Baez worked a first-inning walk. It was his first free pass since June 17, and Baez promptly stole his 17th base of the season. With 17 home runs as well, he's in serious 30-30 club contention. The last Cubs player to accomplish the feat was Sammy Sosa in 1995 (36 HR, 34 SB).

HE SAID IT

"I knew what was wrong, and what I've been trying to work on. It was still inconsistent. It'd be one good, one bad, I couldn't repeat it. Today, in the third inning, something just clicked and I was able to repeat one after another. So that was a really good feeling." -- Hendricks, when asked if his mechanics felt different Monday.

UP NEXT

Jose Quintana will be looking to win consecutive games for the first time since April 28 when he faces the Giants at 9:15 p.m. CT on Tuesday at AT&T Park. After posting a 4.33 ERA throughout the month of June, the lefty began July with six innings of two-run ball against the Tigers on Wednesday to earn his seventh win of the season. Quintana will be hoping to avoid the long ball; after giving up two to the Tigers, he's allowed a home run in his last three starts.

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Cubs.com

Bryant launches homer in first rehab game

By Troy Provost-Heron

SEVIERVILLE, Tenn. -- The first prolonged absence from the baseball diamond in Kris Bryant's career did little to prevent him from making a statement that he is ready to return to the Cubs.

The Chicago third baseman capped his first rehab game at Double-A Tennessee on Monday by crushing a two-run home run over the left-field fence in his fourth at-bat.

Bryant's blast was validation of his decision to take a break and allow his ailing left shoulder to heal instead of playing through the injury.

"It bothered me when swinging and my follow-through because I've always had a big, long follow-through, and with big, long levers, sometimes things wear down, and that's just kind of what it was," Bryant said. "I'm glad that I said something when I did because if I just kept playing through it, it could have been a lot worse."

Bryant has been sidelined since June 23 with left shoulder inflammation, but said his shoulder feels good and that he only needs to regain his timing before rejoining the Cubs. For now, barring any setbacks, the plan is for him to play in two games before returning to the Majors.

"It's responded great. I think we've really strengthened it and gotten it to where it needs to be," Bryant said. "... Taking two weeks off is tough. It's hard to get thrown right back into the fire like that. I thought coming down here and taking some at-bats in a no-pressure environment -- obviously, I would love to help the team win -- but for me, I just want to get that timing back."

The injury showed no signs of hampering the 2016 National League MVP on Monday.

He consistently drove balls to and over the wall during batting practice and continued that power showcase with his home run, a no-doubt shot off a 91 mph fastball from Benton Moss in the seventh inning.

It was the type of shot that Bryant became known for back in 2014 when he was establishing himself as a rising star inside Smokies Park. In 68 games with Tennessee, he hit 22 home runs before being promoted to Triple-A Iowa midseason.

"This is a fun park to hit in. I love this place, but home runs are home runs," Bryant said. "I don't care where I hit them, but it'd be cool to hit one down here."

Bryant also logged an RBI single in the second, finishing the night 2-for-4 with three RBIs and two runs scored while also playing seven innings at third base. Contributing was a welcomed feeling for Bryant, who watched from the dugout as Chicago amassed a 9-5 record in his absence entering Monday.

"[I've been] very hungry, especially watching the team have so much success like they've been doing," Bryant said. "I was kind of sitting on the bench feeling useless watching the game. Sometimes, it's good to get away from it and be a fan. I think I used my time wisely."

Before landing on the disabled list, Bryant was slashing .280/.383/.481 with nine home runs and 36 RBIs.

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Cubs.com

Cubs sports psychologist Ravizza passes at 70
By Carrie Muskat

CHICAGO -- Ken Ravizza, a pioneer in sports psychology who worked closely with Cubs manager Joe Maddon and Angels skipper Mike Scioscia, passed away Sunday night. He was 70.

On Monday, Maddon posted on Twitter: "My brother ... your voice and thoughts shall remain in my mind forever ... our work continues ... 'Attitude is a Decision' #BreatheDeep"

Joe Maddon



@CubsJoeMadd

My Brother.....your voice and thoughts shall remain in my mind forever....our work continues...."Attitude is a Decision" #BreatheDeep

Ken Ravizza

@KenRavizza1

Despite an outpouring of love & prayers, Ken died peacefully last night surrounded by love.

The support from around the world has sustained us. Thank you for all of it!

We're so grateful for the time we had with Ken and know that his legacy will live on.

—Claire, Monica & Nina

Ravizza worked with a variety of athletes -- from high schoolers to Olympians -- and treated them all with the same respect and professionalism. In 1985, Angels pitching coach Marcel Lachemann asked Ravizza to work with the staff, and the relationship thrived. Now, nearly every Major League team has a sports psychology department.

Ravizza, a regular in the Cubs' clubhouse, joined the team as a consultant in 2015 when Maddon was hired as manager.

"Ken's presence is felt in everything that we are about as Cubs," Josh Lifrak, director of the Cubs' mental skills program, said Monday. "His fingerprints are all over our process of playing baseball and our player development. If you watch how we play -- going pitch to pitch, never giving up, staying in the moment -- that is what Ken was all about.

"Personally, he was a friend first, and that's how you always felt when you talked with him: That he simply cared about you," Lifrak said. "If you talk to anyone in baseball, they will say the same thing."

Ravizza has had an impact on players, managers, coaches, and front-office staff, but he always stayed behind the scenes.

"His fingerprints are not only on us but on the entire sport of baseball," Lifrak said. "In terms of the Cubs' mental-skills program, Ken was a crucial piece to mentoring our entire staff and helping craft our message. He helped create a loving and caring culture that we are all about. He will be deeply missed by myself and our entire organization."

The Dodgers' Justin Turner posted on Twitter: "This morning the sports world lost one of the best mental game coaches to ever do it. There's no doubt in my mind I would have never made it to the big leagues without @KenRavizza1. He always had a different perspective and I'll never forget his voice! #YouWorkinIt RIP Kenny"

Justin Turner

✓

@redturn2

This morning the sports world lost one of the best mental game coaches to ever do it. There's no doubt in my mind I would have never made it to the big leagues without @KenRavizza1. He always had a different perspective and I'll never forget his voice! #YouWorkinIt RIP Kenny

Tim Mead, vice president of communications for the Angels, remembered Ravizza on Monday as well. Said Mead on Twitter: "His impact on so many is immeasurable and his legacy will be a lasting one. @KenRavizza1 used not only his professional skills, but his genuine compassion, honesty and caring for each individual he connected with. #RIPKen"

Ravizza's wife, Claire, posted on Twitter that he died peacefully Sunday night.

"The support from around the world has sustained us," she wrote. "Thank you for all of it!"

Ravizza earned his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California in 1973 and was a professor in the kinesiology department at Cal State-Fullerton, where he taught courses in the area of applied sports psychology for 38 years. In 2016, he wrote a book, "Heads Up Baseball 2.0," for which Maddon wrote the forward. The two worked together for 30 years.

"Ken was a pioneer in his field and yet he was an even greater human being," Maddon said Monday. "He had this calm, patient approach to his craft yet his message was always loud and clear. His words were impactful, made you think and were accompanied by passion and understanding. Ken's message resonated with a lot of different folks, whether you were a professional athlete who had reached the mountaintop, a first-year coach or somewhere in between, Ken was there to lend his voice and help others achieve their dreams."

Ravizza was able to connect with players, whether it was catcher Willson Contreras or pitcher Mike Montgomery. Several Cubs players expressed condolences via social media Monday.

"As players, you can go one or two ways with sports psychologists," first baseman Anthony Rizzo said in San Francisco. "He did a really good job of being available at all times. When you talk to him, it was great. You let whatever you want off your chest. Life, baseball, anything. You just talk to him. He was always there, he was always happy, he was always smiling. Life happens fast. That's why you got to enjoy every day."

Said infielder Tommy La Stella: "He was an unbelievable person, an even better friend. Expert listener. ... His greatest strength was his ability to listen and truly hear what you needed and put it in a language that would make sense. He had such a knack for that. His communication, so much of it came from his ability to listen."

Condolences on Monday came from college coaches, such as Oregon's George Horton and Penn State's Rob Cooper to Yankees third-base coach Phil Nevin, who wrote, "Ken Ravizza, simply put, set the bar for mental preparedness in sports and life. We started when I was kicking field goals in college. Continued thru my baseball career. I was lucky to have met him as thousands of others were. RIP my friend."

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ESPNChicago.com

Sports psychologist Ken Ravizza helped keep Cubs at ease

By Jesse Rogers

SAN FRANCISCO -- The baseball world is mourning the loss of one of its pioneers in the mental-skills field after longtime sports psychologist Ken Ravizza died Sunday night after suffering a heart attack last week. Ravizza, 70, was a favorite of Chicago Cubs manager Joe Maddon, who knew and employed Ravizza for decades.

"He was the best at what he does," Maddon said Monday afternoon. "I hear his voice in my head. He's left an eternal impact on all of us."

Ravizza came of age at a time when even talking about things like mental skills and sports psychology was taboo, particularly in baseball, where managers had the final word on everything.

"Baseball wasn't ready for him," Maddon said. "Every manager thought he had all the answers. ... He's another coach. No different than your hitting coach or your pitching coach or infield coach. He's going to help you think more clearly in a difficult moment and that's a good thing."

Maddon ticked off the players Ravizza worked with, from Dante Bichette to Evan Longoria to current members of the Cubs. Ravizza visited with the team recently while the Cubs were in Los Angeles and was scheduled to do so again this week while they are back in California. Ravizza was a professor at Cal State Fullerton.

"I'm really sad," the Cubs' Ben Zobrist said. "I think everyone in here is. He was really great to have conversations with. I felt like he never stopped learning from us even though he was trying to help us learn at the same time."

Cubs infielder Tommy La Stella contemplated quitting the game several years ago, though it wasn't Ravizza who talked him out of it. That wasn't his style nor what made him special, according to La Stella.

"He was an expert listener," he said. "That's a lost art nowadays. Everyone is in a rush to share their opinions and share what they know. That wasn't Ken."

Anthony Rizzo

✓

@ARizzo44

"Hey mannn"!!! Thank you for everything you have done not only for the organization but for our entire baseball family. You are a true pioneer. I will miss you Doc. Every time I rock in the box I'll be rocking for you.

Jon Lester

✓

@JLester34

Life is crazy, one minute you're celebrating and the next you're mourning. We lost a great one last night y'all, the good doctor @KenRavizza1 was in a league all his own. Rest easy buddy, thank you for everything.

Ravizza's last book, "Heads-Up Baseball 2.0," is an updated version of the title first published in 1994. This one features a cover photo of Anthony Rizzo, who stressed how far mental skills have come over the years. Some players still are more accepting of the approach than others, and that was just fine for Ravizza.

"As players it can go one of two ways with sports psychologists," Rizzo said. "He was great. You could get whatever you want off your chest. Life, baseball, anything. He was always there, always smiling. ... Life happens fast."

Ravizza was well known in baseball, but Maddon stressed his work with football players and Olympians, among others. He also played a part in some of the manager's favorite sayings.

"'Attitude is a decision,' that was him," Maddon said. "'Do not permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure,' as well."

Ravizza was there for the players. Huddled with them at their lockers in good times and bad, he was an ear and a gentle voice -- one that will be missed.

"He was an unbelievable person and better friend," La Stella said.

"He's made an impact on all of them," Maddon said.

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NBC Sports Chicago

Kris Bryant starts rehab stint with a bang

By Dan Santaromita

Kris Bryant is nearing his return from injury and if his first game on his rehab stint is any indication, he might not have much rust to shake off.

Bryant started his rehab stint with Double-A Tennessee on Monday and went deep in his fourth trip to the plate. He homered off reliever Benton Moss in the seventh inning to give the Tennessee Smokies fans in attendance some nostalgic feelings.

Bryant finished 2-for-4 with a single, three RBIs, two runs scored and a strikeout before getting pulled ahead of the eighth inning.

After getting drafted in 2013, Bryant began his first full season of pro ball with the Smokies in 2014. He played 68 games there and hit .355/.458/.702 before getting promoted to Triple-A.

Now that Bryant has built up quite the MLB resume, he helped draw the biggest crowd of the season for the Smokies.

Bryant wasn't struggling this year with the Cubs, but his numbers before going on the disabled list with a left shoulder injury were the worst since his rookie season in 2015. Bryant is hitting .280/.383/.481 in 66 games with the Cubs this year.

The Cubs thought Bryant could return for the Giants series, which also starts on Monday. Bryant's home run and two-hit outing show that could still be in play.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs anticipate Kyle Hendricks' outing will invigorate the starting rotation

By Mark Gonzales

Kyle Hendricks didn't start to feel sharp until the third inning Monday night, but he and the Cubs hope his excellent effort has a contagious effect on the rest of the rotation.

"That's the outing we were looking for," manager Joe Maddon said after Hendricks regained the sharpness of his fastball to complement his changeup and curveball for a season-high 8 1/3 innings of a 2-1, 11-inning loss to the Giants at AT&T Park.

Hendricks retired 10 consecutive batters and 12 of 13 before issuing his first walk to Brandon Belt on his 109th and final pitch in the ninth inning.

The Cubs anticipate left-hander Jose Quintana can come close to duplicating what Hendricks achieved. The key to a Quintana turnaround will be rediscovering his changeup that has deserted him recently.

“That becomes contagious sometimes when you got a guy that pitches like that,” Maddon said. “We’ll see ‘Q’ again and see what that looks like. I really believe you can see that version of Kyle most of the time for the rest of the season.”

If it weren’t for the second of two errors committed by first baseman Anthony Rizzo in the fifth inning, Maddon believes Hendricks could have earned a 1-0 shutout.

“No excuse,” Rizzo said after missing a pickoff throw from Hendricks that enabled Alen Hanson to score the tying run from first base. “Just one of those freak things that happened. Just turn the page from it.”

Hendricks will get an extra day of rest before making his final start of the first half on Sunday, while Quintana could benefit from a strong outing Tuesday night in his final start before the All-Star break.

“You take that break, you feel better about yourself coming back,” Maddon said. “You feel you locked into something, and that’s always a good thing. We’re looking for Q to do the same thing.”

Hendricks was able to locate his fastball more effectively to his glove side. His changeup faded and disrupted the timing of the Giants hitters, who also had to adjust their eye levels due to Hendricks’ big-breaking curves early in counts.

“We’ve been wanting to throw (the curve) more,” Hendricks said. “I’ve been wanting to mix it in. I just haven’t been throwing the other stuff well enough to do that.”

Hendricks tempered some of the optimism stemming from his sharpness but was glad to have one more start on Sunday at San Diego.

“It’s a relief in a way, but it’s still just one outing,” said Hendricks, whose ERA dipped from 4.27 to 3.93. “It felt good to feel the good (pitches), and now I got to engrain those good habits.”

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Chicago Tribune

Kyle Hendricks rebounds, but Cubs lose 2-1 to Giants in 11

By Mark Gonzales

Kyle Hendricks regained his 2016 form Monday night.

Despite Hendricks’ efforts, the Cubs fell short in a 2-1 loss to the Giants in 11 innings at AT&T Park.

With one out, Andrew McCutchen hit a single and advanced to third on a hit by Brandon Belt off Steve Cishek. The Cubs employed a five-man infield as Pedro Strop replaced Cishek.

Brandon Crawford was intentionally walked, but Pablo Sandoval foiled the strategy by hitting a game-winning single to left.

In the 10th, Hunter Pence hit a triple that barely eluded center fielder Albert Almora Jr. with one out off Cishek. But Cishek rebounded by striking out pinch-hitter Chase d’Arnaud and rookie Steven Duggar.

Hendricks, who pitched six innings only once in his last seven starts, threw arguably his best performance of 2018. He allowed only five hits while attaining season highs with eight strikeouts and 8 1/3 innings.

Hendricks, the 2016 National League ERA leader, didn't issue a walk until his 109th pitch to Belt. Left-hander Randy Rosario took over and induced Brandon Crawford to fly to center and Pablo Sandoval to ground into a force play.

Hendricks got stronger as his outing progressed. After allowing a single to Pence in the fifth, Hendricks retired the next 10 batters and finished with a season-high eight strikeouts. This equaled Hendricks longest outing of the season, when he beat the Marlins 14-2 on May 7.

In his last five starts against the Giants, Hendricks has a 1.38 ERA — including a 6-2 victory over the Giants on May 25 in which he pitched seven-innings of two-hit ball.

The Cubs manufactured their run when Ian Happ led off the third with a double, moved to third on a single by Albert Almora Jr. with one out, and a high throw from Alen Hanson to first allowed Addison Russell to reach first safely and enabled Happ to score.

The Giants tied the game in the fifth when first baseman Anthony Rizzo failed to catch a pickoff throw from Hendricks that enabled Hanson to score from first base.

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Chicago Tribune

Kris Bryant homers, hits RBI single in minor-league rehab assignment
By Mark Gonzales

Kris Bryant might not need more than two games on a minor league rehab assignment after going 2-for-4 with a two-run home run Monday night for Double-A Tennessee.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon said the Cubs would reassess Bryant's progress from left shoulder inflammation following Tuesday night's game for the Smokies.

Bryant played seven innings for Tennessee in his first game since June 22, playing seven innings and committing a throwing error.

But Bryant was productive at the plate, as he hit an RBI single in the second and later hit his home run in the seventh off Benton Moss in a 6-2 win over Montgomery. Bryant reached base on an error in his first at-bat and struck out in his third at-bat.

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs consultant Ken Ravizza dies at 70; sports psychologist hired by the Cubs in 2015
By Mark Gonzales

Dr. Ken Ravizza, whose mental skills teaching expanded from nearly 40 years with the Cal State Fullerton gymnastics teams to the last three seasons with the Cubs, died Sunday night in Southern California.

“We’re going to miss him,” said manager Joe Maddon, whose association with Ravizza started in the mid-1980s in the Angels’ organization. “I miss him already. I hear his voice in my head. He’s left an internal impact on all of us.”

Ravizza passed away late Sunday, six days after suffering a heart attack. “Heads-Up Baseball 2.0,” a book Ravizza co-authored with Tom Hanson last year, was placed on a counter near the entrance of the visitor’s clubhouse at AT&T Park.

The Cubs hired Ravizza, 70, as a consultant in 2015 after he had worked for several years Maddon with the Rays.

“He was the best at what he did,” said Maddon, who would run several of his slogan by Ravizza for approval and would even speak at some of Ravizza’s classes at CSF in the winter in preparation to address his players in spring training.

Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant once referred to Ravizza as the “godfather” of sports psychology. One of Ravizza’s more popular teachings occurred in spring training on the agility field. He placed 162 baseballs in a line, separated by seven bats representing each month of the season. The extra bat and balls represented the playoff run the Cubs aimed for.

“He did a really good job of being available at all times,” first baseman Anthony Rizzo said. “You could get everything off your chest - Life, baseball, anything.”

“He’s done a lot for this organization, but so much in our baseball world.”

Maddon connected with Ravizza through Angels pitching coach Marcel Lachemann, but Maddon believes the acceptance of Ravizza’s teaching began to swell significantly through former baseball coaches Augie Garrido of CSF and Dave Snow of Long Beach State.

“(Pro) baseball was not ready for him,” said Maddon, who added that Garrido and Snow saw the value of Ravizza’s teachings. “Every manager thought he had all the answers.”

Ravizza taught classes for nearly 40 years at Cal State Fullerton on stress management and applied sports psychology before several U.S. Olympians, college and professional teams enlisted Ravizza’s services during subsequent decades.

“He was an unbelievable person and even a better friend,” Cubs infielder Tommy La Stella said. “He was an expert listener, and that’s a lost art these days nowadays.”

“I think everyone is in a rush to share their opinions and share what they know. That wasn’t Kenny. His greatest strength was his ability to listen.”

Ravizza’s book was published two years after Cubs President Theo Epstein established a mental skills program for the entire organization, with Ravizza hired as a consultant.

Maddon said Ravizza worked closely with pitchers Mike Montgomery, Kyle Hendricks and catcher Willson Contreras. Ravizza visited the Cubs two weeks ago in Los Angeles and had planned to rejoin the team for their West Coast trip that started Monday in San Francisco and conclude this weekend in San Diego.

“People are still reading Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill,” Maddon said two years ago. “Those messages started in the 1920s and filtered to today. A lot of times the people you read about today are the more present gurus. A lot of it is a twist on what had been written years ago. I just think Kenny remains contemporary, and his message never gets old.”

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Chicago Tribune

Cubs rotation needs Kyle Hendricks, Jose Quintana to start clicking

By Mark Gonzales

Cubs President Theo Epstein reinforced his faith in the team’s top-heavy rotation last week, based on how good Kyle Hendricks and Jose Quintana can be.

That faith was to be put to the test in the first two games of their series against the Giants, with Hendricks trying Monday night to rekindle the success he’s achieved in his last four starts against them and break out of the “mechanical rut” that has haunted him during the first half.

With Hendricks and Quintana struggling, the rotation is averaging 5 1/3 innings per start. The Cubs likely won’t have the injured Yu Darvish through at least the end of the month. Darvish played catch Monday in San Francisco.

For Hendricks, who relies on his changeup and sinker to induce feeble contact, his lack of command has cost him dearly. His 16 home runs allowed entering Monday were one fewer than he allowed last season and one more than he did in 2016, and he already has issued 30 bases on balls after totaling between 40 and 44 in his first three full seasons.

Hendricks has solved his pitching problems in the past, but they never have persisted this long. After he returned from a finger injury and a 4.09 first-half ERA in 2017, he rebounded with a 2.19 ERA in his final 13 starts and struck out 72 in 78 innings to help lead the Cubs to their third consecutive playoff appearance.

“It’s just a matter of time,” Epstein said. “But there’s something to be said for battling and keeping your team in games when you’re not locked in. And when you are in a mechanical rut, he’s been taking the ball and keeping his team competitive.”

Quintana, who faces the Giants on Tuesday night, presents a different challenge. One of Quintana’s best outings was Wednesday, when he allowed only a pair of solo home runs in five innings despite lacking an effective changeup during a comeback win over the Tigers.

“His changeup has become moot,” manager Joe Maddon said after the game. “We have to get the changeup back as being pertinent.”

Epstein acknowledged that Quintana, who is 0-3 with a 5.82 ERA in three career starts against the Giants, has become a two-pitch pitcher at times. But recently, Quintana has experimented with different grips so “he can throw a dozen of them instead of three or four, and that makes a big difference.”

The Cubs can take some comfort that their defense, led by outfielders Jason Heyward, Albert Almora Jr. and Kyle Schwarber and All-Star infielder Javier Baez, have performed exceptionally well. That’s taken some pressure off a rotation that ranks 11th in the National League with 402 strikeouts.

The lack of swing-and-miss starters last season convinced Epstein and his staff to sign Darvish and free-agent closer Brandon Morrow.

But Darvish, Morrow and reliever Carl Edwards Jr. have missed significant chunks of the season. And the lack of sharpness by Hendricks and Quintana has put added pressure on the defense.

“When we’re at our best, we’re going to be inducing a lot of swing-and-miss,” Epstein said. “Right now, we’re not. But you want to craft your team so we can survive without it.”

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Chicago Tribune

Greater commitment to hydration has helped Willson Contreras' durability
By Mark Gonzales

Willson Contreras returns Monday to AT&T Park in a better state than when he left Aug. 9 during the Cubs' last visit to San Francisco.

The newly minted starting catcher for the National League All-Star team credits a greater commitment to hydrating after straining his right hamstring while running to first base and missing a month last season.

Contreras has shown no signs of wearing down, even after catching the final 23 innings of the Cubs' three-game sweep of the Twins on June 29-July 1 in unbearable heat at Wrigley Field. Since June 30, Contreras is 11-for-22 (.500) to increase his batting average from .268 to .287.

“What’s been best for me the first half of the season is that I’ve been able to stay healthy,” Contreras said Friday. “I’ve been in the lineup almost every day and have done things to help my team win.

“My home run number (seven) might not be as high as I’d like it to be, but I feel like I’m doing a lot to help the team, and that’s really my focus.”

Contreras hasn’t experienced any leg issues and has hit five triples in addition to catching 629 innings.

“One thing I learned from last year is the importance of staying hydrated and making sure I work on my legs,” Contreras said. “That’s helped me a whole lot this year, especially with how hot it’s been recently.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Panda Depress: Sandoval's walkoff in 11th spoils gem by Cubs' Kyle Hendricks
By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO — Pablo Sandoval reached out and slapped a soft single to left field with one out and the bases loaded in the bottom of the 11th inning Monday night as the Giants beat the Cubs 2-1 on the extra-inning walkoff.

Back-to-back one-out hits off reliever Steve Cishek by Andrew McCutchen and Brandon Belt put runners at the corners to set the stage for the game-winner.

Cubs manager Joe Maddon brought in Pedro Strop to replace Cishek, brought in left fielder Ben Zobrist as a fifth infielder (for the second straight inning) and intentionally walked Brandon Crawford to set up the force at the plate.

Enter Sandoval.

Game over.

Cishek turned back a 10th-inning threat by the Giants by striking out pinch-hitter Chase d'Arnaud and Steven Duggar after allowing a one-out triple to Hunter Pence on his first pitch in relief of Randy Rosario.

The Cubs scored the only earned run before extra innings, after Ian Happ led off the third with a double to center.

One out later, Albert Almora Jr. single Happ to third. And Addison Russell followed with a grounder to short that missed becoming an inning-ending double play by the margin of a high relay throw to first by second-baseman Alen Hanson — Happ scoring on the play.

Cub first baseman Anthony Rizzo's first career two-error inning handed the Giants the tying run in the fifth. Rizzo's first error came when he couldn't handle second baseman Javy Baez's cross-body throw on a slow roller leading off the inning.

After a fielder's choice put speedier Hanson at first instead of hefty Sandoval, Rizzo's second error followed — when he couldn't handle a pickoff throw that went all the way down the right field line into the Cubs' bullpen.

By the time Baez picked it up, Hanson was heading home, eventually sliding under the tag on a close play.

"I just have to catch them. End of story," said Rizzo, a Gold Glove winner. "It's one of those freak things. I've just got to turn the page real quick."

Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks, who had been struggling with mechanics and command this season, found it all in one big start by the Bay.

"The fastball command was finally there and it just opened up the rest of the game for me," Hendricks said. "I found my lanes, found the arm slot, and it was probably the best changeup I've had all year.

"It still wasn't great in the beginning. It kind of clicked somewhere in the third inning, but it just really felt good. It's a relief in a way, but still it's just one outing. I've got to ingrain those good habits. Back at it tomorrow."

The 2016 ERA champ pitched 8 1/3 innings for the longest start of the season for the Cubs, without allowing an earned run.

"That's the Kyle that we know and love," Maddon said. "That's one of the best games I've seen him throw. Physically his stuff was that good.

"The velocity was better than normal. The location of the fastball was outstanding. The changeup was a swing-and-miss pitch again."

He left the game only after issuing a one-out walk to Belt in the ninth on his 109th pitch of the game — his first walk of the night.

Hendricks allowed just five hits and struck out eight in the no-decision.

He lowered his ERA 34 points to 3.93.

He has on start left before the All-Star break, Sunday in San Diego — a start he's especially looking forward to now.

"Definitely. I knew it was turning around a little bit," h said. "I felt more good [pitches], even in my past outings. But at this point now you just want to keep rolling, stay on your routine and just try to lock in all those good habits."

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Chicago Sun-Times

Cubs suffer 'hard loss' with death of sports psychology pioneer Ken Ravizza, 70

By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO – Cubs players had big plans for Monday night in San Francisco when one of the more popular staffers was due to join the club for the start of its west coast road trip.

Instead, the trip started on a downcast, sobering note with the news Monday that team psychologist Ken Ravizza – a pioneer in sports psychology – had died, several days after suffering a heart attack near his home in the Los Angeles area.

"He was always there, he was always happy, he was always smiling," said first baseman Anthony Rizzo, who wore "KR" on his hat during Monday's game against the Giants. "It's just weird. You see him in L.A. on our last trip and he was supposed to be here, and we had plans.

"Life happens fast."

Ravizza, 70, built a practice and reputation through the 1980s and '90s during a time of widespread resistance from often hardscrabble managers and general managers in one of the most old-school cultures in sports: baseball.

Working along the way in Olympic sports, football, women's volleyball, Australian rugby and other sports, Ravizza's reputation grew in baseball through work with the Cal State-Fullerton program and the Angels minor league system – where Joe Maddon became a believer, advocate and friend.

"It was quite a shock," said Maddon, who brought Ravizza into the Cubs' organization when hired before the 2015 season — after having taken him to Tampa Bay for his first job as a big-league manager.

"I just want people to know he was the best at what he did. He left an eternal impact on a lot of us. ... There's a tremendous amount of Ken's influence that I spew on a daily basis.

"I'm going to miss him. I miss him already."

Shortstop Addison Russell called it a “hard loss” for the team, losing a widely respected voice in the business who helped Russell feel he belonged in the big leagues as a rookie in 2015 and to become an All-Star in 2016.

“Something that always stuck with me from Day 1 that I met him was ‘Embrace that breath,’ “ Russell said. “When you embrace your breath you embrace the presence, where your feet are at today. Just focus on your breath. Take a deep breath.”

Utility man Ben Zobrist worked with Ravizza both in Tampa Bay as a young player and with the Cubs as a veteran.

“Most people in the game don’t even realize how much he’s bought that conversation to light,” Zobrist said. “He and Joe together really, as a partnership really bringing the mental side of the game to light was a big-time step forward in the game — to bring that into mainstream, where it was no longer looked as a weakness but as another way to keep getting better.”

“He’s an amazing person and an even better friend,” said infielder Tommy La Stella, whose reconciliation with the team after refusing to report to the minors in 2016 was bridged in large part through Ravizza’s efforts. “He was an unbelievable listener. I just liked to listen to him talk. He has so much knowledge and experience – life experience. Honestly, we never really talked baseball much.”

“He knew how to put things that made sense to your mind because he was listening to you talk and he knew it would make sense to you. He had an incredible knack for that.”

Former Cubs catcher John Baker, now in the Cubs’ mental skills department, credited Ravizza for bringing Eastern philosophy to sports – against the grain of the tough-guy culture of American sports – with big success.

“When we’re in L.A. he’s recommending I go visit the cathedral, not for religious purposes, but just to go experience the vibe in that place,” Baker said. “He sent Tommy to the [Lake Shrine] Self Realization Center in Malibu to walk through the garden, because he thought he’d appreciate it.

“He impacted a lot of lives.”

“His mission and everything that he was working to do in professional sports is already well underway,” La Stella said.

“He was the first, man. And he was the best.”

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Chicago Sun-Times

Changing of the shin guard? Cubs’ Willson Contreras serves All-Star notice

By Gordon Wittenmyer

SAN FRANCISCO – When Cubs catcher Willson Contreras learned Sunday morning he officially was a National League All-Star, he went almost immediately to the batting cage beneath the stands to hug hitting coaches Chili Davis and Andy Haines, and to tell staff assistant Juan Cabrera.

“Then I took like five minutes for myself,” he said.

That's when the tears began to flow.

"I started crying because of where I come from and the all the things that I've been through throughout my minor-league career," he said. "And now I'm starting the All-Star game. It means a lot to me."

Contreras, in his second full year as a Cubs starter, was second in the fan voting for more than a month, before passing Giants catcher Buster Posey – a favorite role model of Contreras' – in the final week for the starting nod.

Contreras found out before Monday's game that because of a troublesome hip Posey would be held out of next week's game in Washington. He said with a smile he would ask Posey to make the trip.

"It's been one of my dreams since I was kid, like playing PlayStation, and watching all those guys playing in the All-Star game," he said. "Now that I'm here, I'm going to enjoy those three days. I'll just try to be myself, try to enjoy as much as I can and try to meet the [other All-Stars]. Now I'm going to get some time to spend with the stars."

One byproduct of the selection, along with Posey's as a backup, is that barely five months after Cardinals' catcher Yadi Molina took a shot at Contreras on social media for supposedly not showing enough respect for the old guard Molina was left out when the rosters were announced Sunday.

Molina was selected Monday to replace Posey on the active roster.

Either way, wasn't sure if he would tweak the veteran Molina about it.

Rough translation of Molina's Instagram response to Contreras comments during Cubs Convention: "Respect the ranks."

"I don't know. Maybe," he said, smiling. "I haven't talked to Yadi in a while. I'm just happy to be named as the All-Star National League catcher for my team. It's a blessing from God. God knows what I've been through with all my family. And I think staying humble means a lot to all my fans. And thanks to all my fans and my family, and my friends for giving me huge support."

Clearly, the emotion continues to flow for Contreras, whose personal feelings will be worn on his sleeve during the game – literally.

He plans to bring back the Venezuelan replica flag he used to wear as a sleeve under his uniform before he got a letter in May from MLB threatening a fine for uniform violation.

Contreras' heart breaks for his country, which has sunk into deeper political and economic disarray and despair over the last year or two in particular. After help from Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin's office to get his parents safely out of Venezuela to the U.S. in October 2016, Contreras has in recent months finally been able to help his brother escape to safety in Peru.

"I'm going to try to wear my Venezuela sleeve during the All-Star game; that way I can represent my country here," he said. "I'm proud of where I come from and proud to be a Venezuelan."

Note: Kris Bryant (shoulder) went 2-for-4 with a homer in a minor-league rehab game for Class AA Tennessee on Monday, and he's scheduled to play one more game there before a decision is made about activating him in time for this weekend's series in San Diego (where he played college ball).

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Daily Herald

Cishek, Bass getting job doing out of Chicago Cubs' bullpen

By Sean Hammond

Cubs relief pitcher Steve Cishek hardly lifted weights or played long toss in high school. He was a self-described "late bloomer."

Cishek, a Massachusetts native, played college ball at Division II Carson-Newman University in Jefferson City, Tennessee. He will admit he wasn't accustomed to the level of work being a college athlete required.

"I had some guys on our team that pushed me, and that's what took me to the next level," Cishek said. "There was potential there that was untapped that I didn't realize was there."

The 6-foot-6, 215-pound right-hander has become one of the most consistent arms out of the Cubs' bullpen this season. He has made more appearances (41) than any Cubs pitcher and holds a 1.83 ERA in 39½ innings through Sunday.

When he set foot on campus at Carson-Newman, his fastball topped out in the low 80s. With the right focus and regimen, by the time his freshman year started that spring he was hitting the low 90s.

"We had the right coaching staff to bring that out," Cishek said. "I don't think it matters what school you go to."

The Marlins drafted Cishek in the fifth round of the 2007 draft. He played parts of six seasons with the Marlins before bouncing around to St. Louis, Seattle and Tampa Bay. Cishek signed with the Cubs as a free agent in December.

He's not the only former Division II ballplayer to find success with the Cubs.

Relief pitcher Anthony Bass, who grew up in Michigan, was selected in the fifth round of the 2008 draft by the San Diego Padres after playing at D-II Wayne State in Detroit.

"If you're good enough, from my experience, scouts are going to find you," Bass said. "Word-of-mouth spreads quickly. If you're performing, it's going to get the attention of scouts."

The right-hander was with the Padres from 2011-13 before stints with the Houston Astros (2014) and Texas Rangers (2015). He spent all of 2016 in Japan before returning to Texas in 2017 and then signing with the Cubs during the off-season.

In between all of that, Bass earned his degree a decade after he was drafted. He started taking classes again in 2016 and had just more than 30 credit hours to complete.

In Japan, playing for the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters, Bass had a little bit more time on his hands. Starting pitchers in Japan can leave games in which they are not pitching after the third inning, so Bass utilized his extra time wisely.

"It's definitely challenging," he said. "It's more or less time management, knowing when to knock out certain assignments."

Bass made it to the big leagues by setting goals in incremental steps.

At Wayne State, he just wanted to stand out among pitchers in the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. He wasn't worried about MLB scouts or the rest of D-II baseball. While there, he got to know future NFL running back Joique Bell.

The two lived in the same dorm as freshmen, and they still keep in contact.

Bell, who was trying to make it as a D-II running back, famously worked security at Detroit Lions training camp one summer in college before years later leading the Lions in rushing.

Bell was signed and released by four different NFL teams, playing on numerous practice squads, before finally earning his chance to play in Detroit.

"A situation like mine and Joique's, we really had to open up people's eyes to get noticed," Bass said. "I knew in order to play professional baseball, I needed to do something different, something unique. Whatever that is, just find your niche and go for it."

Bass became the highest draft pick out of Wayne State and the first major-leaguer from the school since 1988.

In 14⅓ innings of relief for the Cubs this season, Bass, currently on the disabled list (illness), has a 0.63 ERA with 14 strikeouts and 1 walk.

Cishek became Carson-Newman's first MLB player since 1985.

"The first day in I was watching guys in rookie ball throwing 95 (mph), every single one of them," Cishek said. "I had never seen anything like it. I was at a D-II school; it puts it into perspective."

Cishek put part of his signing bonus toward finishing his degree in physical education during his first year in the minors. He wanted a fallback plan.

Ten years later, he still hasn't needed it.

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